

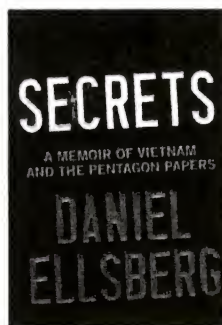
Daniel Ellsberg's leaking of the Pentagon Papers led to President Nixon's resignation.

Secrets Revealed

DANIEL ELLSBERG'S LONG-AWAITED, AND WELL-TIMED, MEMOIR

FOR LONG HOURS LAST SPRING, Daniel Ellsberg was hunkered in the large office in his East Bay home, surrounded by files and boxes, books and notes. The files were labeled "from Pentagon" or "R. McNamara." The boxes were marked "John Dean," "Vietnam," or "Haldeman."

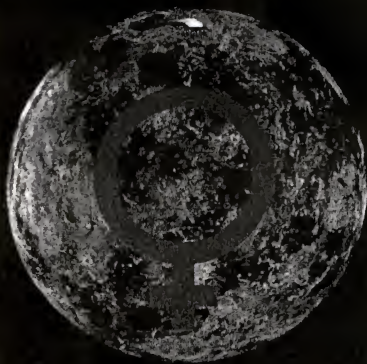
There was barely room to walk—but the office wasn't in disarray. It was, in fact, organized and precise in the amount of information that could be found instantly, a reflection of Ellsberg himself, as he darted from the computer to one specific book, looking for a quote that had just popped into his information-packed head. "I'm just finishing my footnotes," he says, slightly frenetically. The footnotes are the last ingredient for Ellsberg's new book, titled *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, coming out next month, 30 years after the affair that drastically altered the course of his life, and some say, American history.



By 1971, at age 40, Daniel Ellsberg's résumé included a three-year tour of duty as a Marine and a Ph.D. in economics from Harvard. As an expert on the "conscious political use of irrational military threats," he was recruited as a strategic analyst for the Rand Corporation, an Air Force think-tank in Santa Monica. There he concentrated on the command and control of nuclear weapons and nuclear war planning. Ellsberg joined the Defense Department in 1964 and then later spent two years in Vietnam for the State

Department evaluating whether there could be a peaceful solution to the situation there. It was when he returned, now opposed to continued U.S. involvement in Vietnam, that he decided to leak the Pentagon Papers—a massive report on U.S. involvement in Vietnam commissioned by then Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. The report revealed that high-level government officials under four presidents had knowingly deceived

By Maria Streshinsky



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the public. Ellsberg was one of the many authors of the report. By taking the report public, Ellsberg became a lightning rod of American opinion; either he was a traitor or a patriot.

For two weeks in June of 1971, Ellsberg and his wife, Patricia, scuttled between motels and friends' homes, trying to stay below the FBI's radar. "The newspapers said it was the biggest manhunt since the Lindbergh kidnapping," Ellsberg says. With the help of friends, he worked frantically to distribute more than 4,000 pages of classified government documents to 17 of the nation's major newspapers. President Nixon slapped four of the papers with injunctions and threatened to suppress more in an attempt to prevent them from publishing the documents.

The New York Times was the first to print sections of the Pentagon Papers. The nation exploded over the proof of lies from topmost government officials. In a monumental First Amendment case, Ellsberg faced a possible 115 years in prison for theft and for violations of the Espionage Act. The charges were thrown out—after four months of trial—when it became clear that President Nixon had launched an all-out smear campaign, including a break-in at Ellsberg's therapist's office, in an effort to gather damning information. The story was front-page news and took 15 minutes of every news broadcast for more than a month. The release of the Pentagon Papers contributed to the ending of the Vietnam War and shook to the core the American people's trust in their government.

Seventy-one now, Ellsberg—slight, spirited (he's an avid bodysurfer), with sharp blue eyes—is consumed by global passions. Since the Pentagon Papers affair, he has been lecturing, lobbying, and demonstrating against the proliferation of nuclear weapons. He has been arrested more than 60 times at demonstrations. "Vietnam was an 11-year diversion from my true obsessions of reducing and ending the danger of nuclear war," he says, only half joking. For the last three years, however, most of his intensity has been focused on *Secrets*.

One day last fall, with his first-draft deadline rapidly approaching, he agreed to an interview over lunch near his home in the small East Bay community of Kensington. He arrived flourishing a

government memo from the mid-'60s. "Look at this," Ellsberg says. "This memo to McNamara shows that there were top people who thought we could never win the war. It was 1964. There were nine more years of Vietnam after this." Even with his looming deadline, Ellsberg's focus was not on himself, but on the lies told and the truths revealed. "I'm having a hell of a time with Chapter Two," he says. "It's supposed to be my personal history. I'd rather be writing about nuclear proliferation. I've been stuck on this chapter for two years." And with that he rushed off.

Secrets opens with a spellbinding story of one of his first days as an employee at the Pentagon. Cables from the Pacific were shooting across Ellsberg's desk that he was to deliver to his new boss, Assistant Secretary of Defense John McNaughton. The missives were from the commodore of a two-destroyer flotilla in the Tonkin Gulf of Vietnam, urgently explaining that they were under continuous torpedo attack and that they were firing back. As quickly as they started, the memos stopped. By now, though, top U.S. officials were poised for action. Then another set of cables came over the wire. These, Ellsberg writes, basically took it all back. The commodore wrote, "All subsequent Maddox torpedo reports are doubtful in that is suspected that sonarman was hearing ship's own propeller beat." But it was too late. President Johnson was already meeting with national security advisors, and full U.S. military might was heading to Vietnam.

In the infamous Chapter Two, Ellsberg attempts to come to grips with the contradictions in his life: a military and defense background coupled with a peace activist's heart. *Secrets* could not appear at a more important juncture in the nation's history. Ellsberg, once a household name, has resurfaced on the American scene just as the nation is embroiled in its most tumultuous period since Vietnam. From the after-effects of the 9/11 terrorist attacks to the standoff between India and Pakistan—both now nuclear powers—the American people, wary of the dangers, need to be able to believe in their government. Ellsberg, worried that history could repeat itself, is watching closely, ready to sound the alarm. ■

Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers, Viking Press, \$29.95.

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Maia